

Cultivating MANA LĀHUI

BY: TREENA SHAPIRO

Understanding mana is critical to understanding the contemporary Native Hawaiian identity and a key element in building stronger, healthier communities, according to a new book from the Office of Hawaiian Affairs.

Released Nov. 20, *Mana Lāhui Kānaka* is a multidimensional study of mana: what it is, how to articulate it, and how to access and cultivate it. Five years in the making, the 300-page volume builds on Kūkulu Hou, the vision for kanaka leadership presented by author and OHA Ka Pouhana Kamana'opono Crabbe, Ph.D.

Mana Lāhui Kānaka draws from literary and historical records, social science research and first-person accounts – much of which wouldn't have been possible without the translation of Hawaiian language nūpepa, vehicles of mana in their own right. "This book represents a framework to incorporate mana in the 21st century, and is just one tangible representation of our sophisticated identity – who we are as a living culture for the past, present and future," wrote Crabbe in the introduction.

"We intend for this book to be a positive view which, through connecting our kūpuna's words and ideas with contemporary understanding, can then move forward with assertive forward-thinking built from the core of our cultural strength – the mana possessed by each one of the kānaka, mana that is 'ōiwi, the mana lāhui."



Mana means

"Changing the Story"

BY SOLOMON ENOS

WHAT IS MANA?

Historically, European and American scholars described mana in Oceanic cultures as spiritual, supernatural, a magical force, a source of power and more. In Hawaiian traditions, the book states: "Mana was part of a vibrant system that intertwined many other foundations of Hawaiian culture and identity, and was evident to Native Hawaiians through akua, and in their ali 'i, themselves, and their environment."

However, English translations of mana fall short of expressing its meaning and significance from a Native Hawaiian perspective, which is more implicitly discussed in traditional oral literature, genealogies and Hawaiian mele and mo'olelo, notes Crabbe.

A quote from Bradd Shore's *Mana and Tapu* points out how essential it is to understand mana, even if the concept is hard to define: "Manulani Aluli Meyer and other scholars have long held that it's impossible to understand the Polynesian worldview without understanding mana as central to contemporary Native Hawaiian identity. Mana is often felt, seen and experienced, rather than described in words; moreover there are ways to gain and lose mana through behavior. Here, mana is part of the spiritual world, but felt in the material world. In Western terms it might be described as power, or an essence of god or godliness. In some Polynesian languages the literal meaning of mana is 'thunder, storm or wind.'"

Ancient Hawaiians believed mana could be inherited through lineage or acquired through great feats, skill, artistry, talents and gifts, which are cultivated through education and training. But mana is more than a historical concept and remains part of each one of our genealogies today.

Inherited Mana

Ancient Hawaiians believed the gods were the primary source of mana, embodied in the familial and spiritual connection kānaka have to the 'āina and its resources. "Mo'okū'auhau [genealogies] allowed Hawaiians to trace the origins of their lineage and mana to the ancestral gods," the book notes, citing Lilikalā Kame'eiehiwa, Ph.D. Genealogy helped order the Hawaiian class hierarchy; the ali 'i, or ruling class, could trace their lineage more directly to the akua than maka'āinana, who were further removed. Ali 'i, therefore, had more mana than the common people, and could enhance or acquire more mana by acting in ways that were considered pono and fulfilling their kuleana.

Acquired Mana

But mana isn't only a privilege of birth; it can be acquired and actively cultivated through education and training. Expertise and keen intellect were highly admired, as was great skill. Experts in every field, great athletes, winning competitors and triumphant warriors were respected and known for having great mana. "Thus, it was a cultural imperative for Native Hawaiians to kūlia (to strive, to be outstanding) and to become hiapa'i'ole (foremost, expert). Traditional Native Hawaiian education reflected the high value of deft practice and honed intellect, but also reflected the importance of mana," Crabbe wrote.

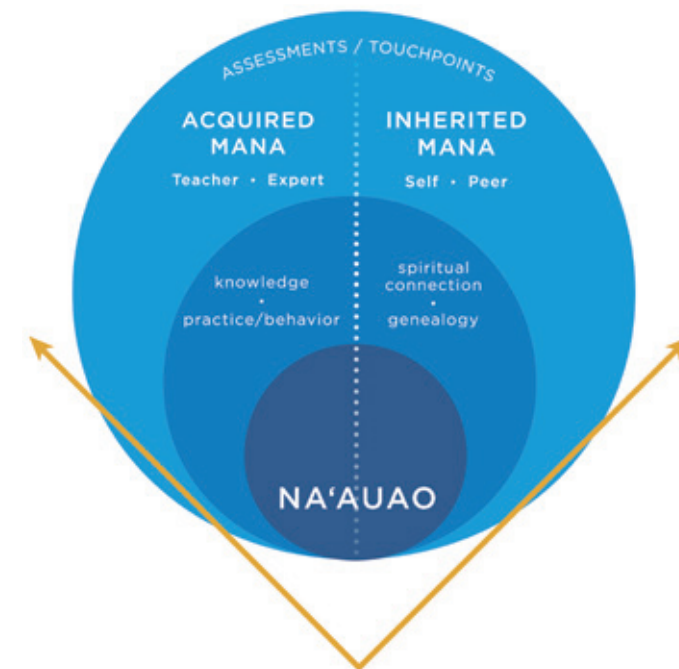
Mana in Places

In the Hawaiian worldview, mana is also connected to place and resources. Some of these places are sacred: wao akua, the realm of the gods, was a place of mana – one rarely penetrated from wao kānaka, the realm of the people, except by those in certain specialized positions. Wahi pana, or storied places, can also have mana for the acts and deeds performed there. Heiau, shrines, burial caves and graves have mana, for example, as do places mentioned in traditional oral literature. Places could also impart mana, such as at Kūkaniloko, a birthing stone site used by generations of ali 'i to ensure their children would be suffused with mana at birth.

"That places and objects in a Native Hawaiian worldview were imbued with mana remains pertinent today. Efforts to repatriate funerary artifacts, as well as iwi kūpuna, demonstrate this," the book's literature review concludes, pointing to the controversy over Mauna Kea stewardship and the Thirty Meter Telescope as examples of places where mana should be protected as sacred.

HOW DO WE ARTICULATE MANA?

Mana Lāhui Kānaka dedicates a chapter to social science methods and research that can help identify and assess mana with relation to the body, mind and spirit. Another chapter offers descriptions of lived mana: "There comes a time when something happens that ignites the spirit and the hearts of the po'e. You know, that comes from our 'āina, that comes from the land. And it's a voice that we all pick up collectively and we hear, and we work in the capacity that we're meant to work to address what is happening," noted a member of the focus group discussions on mana.



Conceptual Model for Mana Assessment and Toolkit Components - By: Stacey Leong Design, LLC.

"Assessing mana requires a multi-dimensional approach informed by a variety of sources – the assessment of mana requires many different perspectives covering different domains. For these reasons, mana is not likely to be captured by a single assessment," the book notes in its conclusion.

HOW DO WE CULTIVATE MANA?

Mana Lāhui Kānaka isn't meant to be prescriptive, instead it includes a framework for ways mana can be used to raise our communities. "Programs/behaviors/communities etc. that want to consider mana should keep the following in mind: Mana could be construed as a disposition, a set of behaviors, beliefs, knowledge, experiences, or a combination of any of the aforementioned," notes Crabbe.

Mana Lāhui Kānaka is available at www.oha.org/mana. In subsequent months, OHA will be reaching out to larger communities to discuss mana, in-person and online. Kānaka 'ōiwi are encouraged to participate and express their own ideas on how mana can be used to strengthen communities, and the lāhui at large. Follow us and use the hashtag #manalahui on social media in the coming year. ■